

This is my go-to recipe when I want to comfort myself with the basics of getting data from American Factfinder. Built on extracting granular information from ACS (the interface will try to steer you in the direction of ACS statistics), this recipe can easily be altered to please different palates by changing census geographies. In follow-up recipes, I will use this same method but alter the geographies (Tracts, ZCTAs, etc) to change the way stats are depicted.

How to ~~Bake a Cake~~ Download Data from AFF

Health Statistics for County Subdivisions within County

Serves Many

Ingredients:

- 1 Computer
- 1 Scrap of Paper
- 1 Writing instrument
- 2 oz. Determination
- 3 oz. Patience

Method :

(Step 1: Setting Up Geography) Go to www.census.gov website and hover your cursor over Data then hover over Data Tools & Apps then slide left to, and click on American Factfinder. Choose Advanced Search and then click on Show me all. At the Search Options Bars (at left), select Geographies. A grey overlay pane, called *Select Geographies* will pop up. Select the Name tab. In the *Enter...Geography Filter Options* search window (just under the Name tab), begin typing in the county name of your choice (I am going to use Westchester County, NY). You will probably see a white drop-down window appear, and it may already contain your county name—if so, select it. Click the grey Go button on the right. At this point you should see your county name pop up on the left in the *Your Geography Filters* (hint: it has a blue X next to it which you can click on if you made a mistake and wanted to get rid of it).

Under *Geography Results*, select the level of geography you want. If you truly want “all” places – including towns – within your county, then I suggest you select “All

County Subdivisions within XYZ County.” Scroll down and look for that category, but don’t check the box to the left of the title, instead click on the blue title and your data will feed up into the *Your Selections* box (which is on the main screen on the upper left, behind the pop-up pane). Hit the **Close (x)** button on the upper right of the grey overlay pane.

(Step 2: Selecting Data) You will now see all the data options that are available to you. These are in effect, just the tip of the iceberg! If you want current demographics, you most probably will select something from ACS 1- , 3- or 5-year estimates. That’s what the AFF interface will subtly steer you to do. (On the other hand, if you want hard numbers from the last Census then you will have to select SF1 or SF2 data (or, in layman’s terms: 2010 data)—but that is in another recipe, so be patient.)

Take note that the “dataset” is listed within the overlay table on the right side. Also—just to make things progress better as we do this—you might want to move the full screen so that you can view the upper right *per page* indicator, where I suggest you change “25” to “75.” The more you can see on your page at once, the better! You can scroll through the topics easier this way, and search for what you would like. It’s still a lot of information to scroll through to look for a piece of data, however. So, it might simply be more effective if you went to the *Refine your search results* window, and typed in a key word. Let’s try that. We want to search for Health Insurance info. Type into the window the word “Health” and select “Health Insurance” from the drop-down window. Click **Go**. A lot of choices will appear—overwhelming, really—but we want the latest data, so to refine our search a bit, just above the table results, on the right and in the *show results from* box, select the drop-down arrow and pick 2012. By doing this, we got rid of all information that isn’t part of the 2012 universe.

Back in the main results list, scroll down and look for “Types of Health Insurance Coverage by Age.” As you see, it is rather laborious to scroll through all the choices. So instead, go back up to the *Refine your search results* window and type in the words “types of” (okay, so I’m cheating a bit by showing you this shortcut) Since I want 5-year data, choose the C27010 table. Click **Go**. Select the Dataset for 5-year estimates. Click on it’s title and the table will appear.

(Step 3: Preparing Data for Downloading) Use a pencil and a scrap of paper to write down the title of what you’ve selected (i.e. “Types of Health Insurance Coverage by Age; Universe: Civilian noninstitutionalized population, 2008-12 ACS 5-year Estimates). You may need to refer back to this later on.

You can manipulate the table that now pops up. If you are going to eventually convert this data into a GIS or map, then I suggest you click on the **Modify Table** icon at the top left. This will allow you to suppress and manipulate data in the table. I personally like to transpose my geographies with the data, so let's try doing that. Click on the **Transpose Rows/ Columns** icon. This will put all your county subdivisions into a list on the left. Now turn off the table tools by clicking on the **Hide Table Tools** icon. *(If you want to download data and shapefiles together, then at this point, skip forward to : Making buttercream frosting a shapefile for your Cake Data.)*

Now click on the **Download** icon. If you simply want to look at the data, or use it for a presentation, then click on the **PDF** radio button, select the **Landscape** radio button, and 8 ½ x 14" and press the **OK** button. You can now save this as a PDF or print it.

This frosting shapefile + data recipe avoids the cloying effect of data overabundance. It is a clean, tidy way to whip up a Census shapefile along with one statistical variant that will join PERFECTLY in ArcGIS. The succulent secret lies in its simplicity: one shapefile containing a geocode column that will match perfectly to the geocodes in your CSV file. Don't be tempted to embellish your CSV file by turning it into an Excel file. Leave it! Your tastebuds will be pleasantly surprised!

Making buttercream frosting a shapefile for your Cake Data

(Step 4: Downloading Data & Shapefile Together) We can now make a map, so to speak. This will create an on-line map of our area. It is necessary for us to create the map on-screen in order to get the shapefiles we need to download. Click on the **Create a Map** icon. Not much happens—except your data values in the table now are highlighted in blue. Click on the first blue value you see, in the **Total** column, and it will begin to create a map on screen. (If you had clicked a different value, it would have created a map for that specific value.) Click on **Show Map** and wait a while. The site will load a map view of the area you selected along with the specific data variable you clicked on. The map view allows you to see if anything is missing geographically.

Above the map view, click on the **Download** icon. A download pop-up menu will appear. Click on the bottom radio button **Shapefile** and then **Ok**. A pop-up appears;

click download. (Sometimes you have to click download twice). A File Download pop-up will appear. Click either **Open** or **Save**. The shapefile and data will both download via the ZIP file. However, they will not be pre-joined. You may want to join them within ArcGIS. The geographic codes that are in the shapefiles and csv spreadsheet data should join and line up perfectly.

Remember that scrap of paper on which I told you to write the table title? You might want to refer to that when you open the data in the csv file. You could then either use the information to name a column in your data table, or use it to give a name to the data file.